Sceptical Intuitions

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SCEPTICAL INTUITIONS

Duncan Pritchard

University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT. I begin by exploring a philosophical case study of the use of intuitions—*viz*., the debate regarding the problem of radical scepticism, paying particular attention to such key figures within this debate as Stroud, Austin and Wittgenstein. I contend that this debate demonstrates something interesting about the nature of intuitions and the role that they can play in philosophical inquiry. In particular, I argue that we need to think of the philosophical use of intuitions as at least sometimes involving a significant level of expertise. I close by considering the relevance of this point about philosophical intuitions to the negative programme in experimental philosophy.

0. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

I will be approaching the topic of intuitions in a tangential fashion. My initial focus will be on the debate regarding the problem of philosophical scepticism, and the role that intuitions play in that debate. In particular, I will be looking at the specific way in which Barry Stroud motivates the radical sceptical challenge, and considering the superficially similar, but fundamentally different, responses to the radical sceptical challenge that can be found in the work of J. L. Austin and Wittgenstein. As we will see, this debate demonstrates something interesting about the nature of intuitions and the role that they can play in philosophical inquiry. More specifically, I will be arguing that it demonstrates that we need to think of the philosophical use of intuitions in such a way that it can require a significant level of expertise. Finally, I will be contending that this conception of the philosophical use of intuitions has a bearing on the negative programme in experimental philosophy.

1. THE RADICAL SCEPTICAL PARADOX

Radical scepticism is one of the age-old problems of philosophy. While it comes in a number of forms, we will here for simplicity's sake focus on how this problem is standardly understood in the contemporary literature.[1] This version, in essence, has the following general structure:

The Template Radical Sceptical Argument

(SP1) I am unable to know that a certain radical sceptical hypothesis doesn't obtain.

(SP2) But I need to be able to know that this radical sceptical hypothesis doesn't obtain if I am to have much of the everyday knowledge which I typically attribute to myself.

(SC) So I am unable to have much of the everyday knowledge which I typically attribute to myself.

We can get a better sense of what this type of scepticism involves by plugging-in a particular radical sceptical hypothesis and seeing what effect it has on what is putatively an epistemically unimpeachable item of ordinary knowledge. For our sceptical hypothesis, we will take the famous 'brain-in-a-vat' ('BIV') scenario, wherein the agent is 'fed' experiences as if she is living a normal life (seeing friends, playing sport, going to work, and so on) when in fact she is a disembodied brain floating in a vat of nutrients that is hooked-up to supercomputers which are generating these fake experiences.[2] For the putatively epistemically unimpeachable item of ordinary knowledge we will take an agent's knowledge, in normal circumstances, that she has hands. Clearly, if, in normal circumstances, one fails to know a proposition like this, then there isn't much that one knows.

We are now in a position to run a specific sceptical argument based on the template above:

The BIV Radical Sceptical Argument

(SP1*) I am unable to know that I am not a BIV.

(SP2*) But I need to be able to know that I am not a BIV if I am to know that I have hands.

(SC*) So I am unable to know that I have hands.

Although (SC*) falls short of the radical sceptical conclusion, given the fact that knowing that one has hands is held to be in ordinary circumstances the kind of thing that one must know if one knows anything of substance about the world, with the conclusion of this specific radical sceptical argument we are only a short logical step from a more general radical sceptical conclusion.

There are several features of this formulation of the radical sceptical argument which are deserving of comment, not least the extent to which this broadly 'Cartesian' way of thinking about radical scepticism (due to how it essentially trades on radical sceptical hypotheses) differs from other conceptions of the radical sceptical problem.[3] Our current concern, however, is not with the details of this formulation of the radical sceptical problem, but rather the fact that this formulation has been held by many to capture the sense in which the problem of radical scepticism—like other 'deep' problems of philosophy, such as the problem of vagueness or the problem of free will—constitutes a philosophical *paradox*. That is, it is held to be a philosophical problem which arises out of a deep tension within our own naturally derived concepts, such that the only way of responding to this difficulty is by arguing for claims which are to some extent counterintuitive. This is not to say, of course, that the problem of radical scepticism, *qua* paradox, is beyond solution. But paradoxes, if they are *bona fide* at any rate (an issue that we will come back to), are more difficult to resolve than ordinary philosophical problems.

In terms of the contemporary debate about scepticism, it is Barry Stroud's seminal book, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Stroud 1984), which brought home to the philosophical community the importance of thinking of radical scepticism in this way. Immediately prior to Stroud's book, it was common within philosophy to treat the problem of radical scepticism as clearly a pseudo-problem, and hence not as representing a paradox at all. But what Stroud so convincingly argued in this book was that the standard responses to radical scepticism of the time—he considered anti-sceptical approaches from such diverse philosophical quarters as ordinary language philosophy, naturalised epistemology and verificationism—fail precisely because they don't take into the account the way in which scepticism seems to naturally fall out of our ordinary ways of epistemic evaluation. As Stroud (1984, 81-2) famously put it, scepticism arises out of "platitudes that we would all accept".[4]

Now this might initially sound puzzling, since the argument given above does not seem to entirely consist of mere platitudes. Indeed, it seems to consist, at least in part, of controversial claims which are at odds with our ordinary practices of epistemic evaluation.

Take (SP1) first. While many philosophers would grant that intuition points to the truth of this proposition, it is certainly not a claim that one would expect to find a non-philosopher making. After all, sceptical hypotheses are simply not considered in normal

contexts of epistemic evaluation. The possibility that one might be a BIV undergoing the relevant deception is just not ever taken seriously in quotidian epistemic contexts. So even if one can convince someone that (SP1) is true, it will be a further matter to show that it falls out of our ordinary practices of epistemic evaluation.

The situation with (SP2) is even more problematic on this score.[5] This is because at first pass not only is it not intuitively true, but also—worse—it actually seems to be intuitively false. For on the face of it, it just seems plainly bizarre to hold that in order to know the kind of propositions that we typically ascribe to ourselves in normal contexts that we should be able to know the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses. Why should I have to know that I am not a BIV in order to know something so mundane as that I have hands, particularly when I can see my hands right in front of me? That this premise should be regarded as a 'platitude' therefore seems clearly misguided.

And note that it doesn't really make any difference whether one focuses on the general form of the sceptical argument (the 'template' radical sceptical argument, as it is described above) as opposed to a particular version of that argument, such as the one which appeals to the BIV sceptical hypothesis. What makes (SP1) dubious applies just as well to (SP1*), and the same goes for the pairing of (SP2) and (SP2*).

It is unsurprising then that immediately prior to Stroud's book the problem of radical scepticism—even when it was taken seriously as a *bona fide* philosophical problem (which it often wasn't)—wasn't regarded as a paradox, in the sense that it could be generated from apparently uncontentious premises.[6] As a result, the radical sceptical problem, although it has of course been taken very seriously during various periods in the history of philosophy, was not regarded as a pressing or important philosophical difficultly during this time.

Stroud countered this consensus against the sceptical paradox by carefully showing how this problem in fact generated by our ordinary epistemic practices, even if there is nothing within our ordinary epistemic practices which would appear to sustain premises like (SP1) and (SP2). He argued that while it is undoubtedly true that in ordinary contexts of epistemic evaluation we do not even consider radical sceptical error-possibilities, much less regard them as having a status such that we need to be able to know them to be false if we are to possess the kind of knowledge which we typically ascribe to ourselves in these contexts, it is nonetheless true that the radical sceptical problem arises out of our ordinary epistemic practices.

Perhaps the best way to make sense of Stroud's claim in this regard is to consider how he replies to J. L. Austin's famous attack on radical scepticism in his seminal paper 'Other Minds' (Austin 1961).[7] Key to Austin's attack on scepticism is to highlight how the sceptic is employing standards for rational evaluation which aren't mirrored in everyday life. For while it is undeniable that in ordinary epistemic contexts we require agents to be able to rule out (i.e., know to be false) a range of error-possibilities which could undermine their knowledge of the target proposition, this range of error-possibilities does not extend to radical sceptical hypotheses like the BIV hypothesis. As Austin argues, in order to know that the creature before you is a goldfinch, you might well need to be able to rule-out the possibility that it is another sort of bird, such as a woodpecker, but you don't need to be able to rule out the possibility that it is a hologram of a goldfinch, or a stuffed goldfinch. As he puts the point in a famous passage:

> "Enough is enough: it doesn't mean everything. Enough means enough to show that (within reason, and for the present intents and purposes) it 'can't' be anything else, there is no room for an alternative, competing, description of it. It does not mean, for example, enough to show it isn't a *stuffed* goldfinch." (Austin 1961, 84)

By contrasting the sceptic's process of epistemic evaluation with our everyday process of epistemic evaluation, Austin is trying to persuade us that the sceptical usage is somehow illegitimate, in that it is a perversion of our normal practices of epistemic evaluation. At the every least, insofar as we are convinced that the kind of epistemic evaluation employed by the sceptic is very different from our everyday process of epistemic evaluation, then it seems to follow that scepticism can't be a paradox in the sense outlined earlier.

It is this last point that Stroud is most keen to counter. He grants that Austin is quite right to claim that in ordinary epistemic contexts we do not require agents to rule-out sceptical error-possibilities, but he maintains that this fact alone doesn't settle the issue of whether scepticism falls out of our ordinary epistemic practices, such that it is a genuine paradox which trades on a deep tension in our naturally derived epistemic concepts. In particular, he argues that given that ordinary epistemic contexts are subject to various kinds of merely practical constraints—e.g., limited time, lack of imagination on the part of the participants, and so on—the failure to consider sceptical error-possibilities in these normal epistemic contexts does not itself exclude the possibility that the sceptic's consideration of these error-possibilities is licensed by our ordinary epistemic practices. In particular, he

argues that the sceptic's system of epistemic evaluation is licensed by our ordinary system of epistemic evaluation on account of the fact that the former is simply a 'purified' version of the latter. That is, if we employ our ordinary practices of epistemic evaluation with due diligence and set aside all purely practical limitations, then what we end up with is the system of epistemic evaluation employed by the sceptic, one that requires (in line with (SP2)) that agents must be able to rule-out radical sceptical hypotheses if they are to have the everyday knowledge that they standardly attribute to themselves.

For our purposes we can set aside the question of whether Stroud is right that the sceptical system of epistemic evaluation is just a purified version of the system of epistemic evaluation that we ordinarily employ. What is more salient is rather the point that in order to demonstrate that scepticism is not a paradox it is not enough to show that our quotidian practices of epistemic evaluation are different from the sceptical practices. Instead, one must further demonstrate that one cannot derive the sceptical system of epistemic evaluation from our ordinary system of epistemic evaluation in the way that Stroud claims.[8]

2. WITTGENSTEIN ON RADICAL SCEPTICISM

On this point it is interesting to contrast Austin's approach to scepticism with the superficially similar, but in fact fundamentally dissimilar, approach to the problem offered by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1969). In this work Wittgenstein is also keen to highlight the differences between the way in which the sceptic conducts epistemic evaluations and how epistemic evaluations are actually conducted in ordinary life. In particular, he argues that our ordinary practice of rational evaluation is essentially local, in that all rational evaluation takes place relative to certain core commitments which are themselves immune to rational evaluation, what Wittgenstein refers to as "hinges":

> "[...] the questions that we raise and our doubts depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn." (Wittgenstein 1969, §341)

So far, Wittgenstein's point is essentially the same as Austin's. Note, however, how this passage continues:

> "That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are in deed not doubted.
>
> But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just can't investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put." (Wittgenstein 1969, §§342-3)

The idea in play here is crucial to understanding Wittgenstein's approach to radical scepticism. For his claim is not merely that there is a radical difference between the essentially local practices of rational evaluation employed in quotidian epistemic contexts and the epistemically unconstrained practices employed in the sceptical context. Instead, his point is much stronger—*viz.*, that it is a matter of *logic* that reasons should be essentially local in the way that he describes, such that the very idea of a fully general rational evaluation of the sort that the sceptic envisages (i.e., a rational evaluation which lacks hinge commitments which are immune to rational evaluation) is simply incoherent. Indeed, what applies to the sceptic here also applies to the *anti*-sceptic—such as Moore (1925; 1939), one of the main figures discussed in Wittgenstein (1969)—who tries to offer a *positive* fully general rational evaluation of our beliefs. According to Wittgenstein, such fully general rational evaluations are impossible, regardless of what philosophical end they are put to.

If Wittgenstein is right then Stroud's account of why radical scepticism poses a paradox is blocked, and hence Wittgenstein achieves something with his anti-sceptical proposal which Austin's anti-sceptical approach failed to achieve. In particular, what Wittgenstein would be demonstrating is that the sceptical practices of epistemic evaluation are not just different (in degree) from our quotidian practices of epistemic evaluation, but in fact fundamentally distinct (i.e., different in kind) and, worse, incoherent. That they are fundamentally distinct deprives Stroud of the logical space within which he can make a case for the claim that the sceptical practices of epistemic evaluation, while different from our ordinary practices of epistemic evaluation, are nonetheless underwritten by them by being simply purified versions of these ordinary practices.[9]

What is at stake here? Why should it matter whether the radical sceptical problem constitutes a paradox? I said earlier that the sceptical problem is easier to resolve if it is not a genuine paradox. We are now in a better position to understand why this is the case. For notice that if scepticism does not arise out of our ordinary epistemic practices, then it is much easier to convict the radical sceptic of making a *theoretical* error. The sceptic is, it seems, offering us a revisionistic epistemology which generates an intellectually objectionable

conclusion, and we might naturally be suspicious of why we should adopt such theoretical revisionism given that it has this effect.

The discussion of Wittgenstein's way of responding to the sceptical problem brings this point out very effectively. For if Wittgenstein is right then the sceptical problem is simply the product of a faulty epistemological picture which endorses the possibility of fully general rational evaluations. Not only do our ordinary epistemic practices not display such fully general rational evaluations, but a closer inspection of the nature of rational evaluation is meant to reveal to us that there could be no such thing as a fully general rational evaluation. It is not then as if we could even make sense of aspiring to conduct the kind of rational evaluation of our beliefs demanded by the sceptic. The theoretical picture being offered to us by the sceptic (and, for that matter, by a certain kind of anti-sceptical epistemologist) is thus simply wrong and so should be rejected out of hand.

In contrast, if radical scepticism does pose a paradox then, as Stroud makes very clear, it is going to be very hard to offer an intellectually compelling response to that problem, since any such response would be forced to deny 'platitudes that we would all accept', and that can hardly be intellectually appealing.[10] Moreover, if Stroud is right that the radical sceptical problem can pose a paradox even if there is only an indirect connection between our ordinary practices of epistemic evaluation and the practices of epistemic evaluation appealed to by the radical sceptic, then simply noting the difference between these two practices of epistemic evaluation will not suffice to ensure that you don't have to deny a platitude in responding to the sceptical problem.[11]

One final point is in order on this score, and this is the sense in which Wittgenstein's response to the problem of radical scepticism can be described as 'quietist'. For note that his goal in this regard is to show that the sceptical problem does not fall out of our ordinary epistemic practices as someone like Stroud would allege, but is rather the product of faulty philosophising. For Wittgenstein, then, we shouldn't think of the problem of radical scepticism as arising out of our ordinary epistemic practices and then being 'solved' by philosophical reflection. Rather, we need to understand that it is a problem that is generated by philosophical reflection and completely detached from our ordinary epistemic practices. Once we understand that, so the line goes, then there is then no problem for philosophy to solve.[12]

3. SCEPTICAL INTUITIONS

Part of what makes quietism an appealing option when it comes to a debate like radical scepticism is the fact that while this is meant to be a paradox, it is at the same time granted by all concerned that it is not obviously a paradox. That is, someone like Stroud will not dispute that ordinary folk will not recognise that they are faced with a paradox when first presented with the sceptical argument. Instead, the idea is that with a certain degree of philosophical ingenuity one can get ordinary folk to realise that, on reflection, there is a paradox in play here. But of course this feature of the debate naturally invites the quietistic thought that perhaps this 'paradox' is generated by philosophical theory rather than being the result of a deep tension in our ordinary epistemic concepts.

We can see this point in action by comparing the radical sceptical problem with other philosophical puzzles which clearly are paradoxical in nature, and which don't require any great philosophical expertise to set-up. Take, for example, the problem of vagueness. Here, for instance, is a particular variant of this problem:

(VP) Removing one hair from a non-bald person's head cannot make them bald.
(VC) So, one can remove single hairs from a non-bald person's head indefinitely without that person becoming bald.

The premise seems undeniable. How could removing a single hair on a non-bald person's head make them bald? But, equally, if this is true then it ought to be the case that any number of iterations of removing a hair from a non-bald person's head will not make them bald too. But then the conclusion of this argument follows deductively from the premise and we have our paradox. As a result, in responding to this problem it thus seems unavoidable that we will be forced as theorists to argue for a claim which is counter to intuition, and hence all responses to the problem of vagueness are to that extent at least problematic.

The problem of radical scepticism, however—even if we grant with Stroud that it is a paradox—is not like the problem of vagueness. We just set up the paradox of vagueness by appealing only to familiar concepts and principles, and by stating a premise which most who are new to philosophy will recognise as obviously true. In this sense, no great philosophical expertise is required to get people to see that there this is something paradoxical about vagueness; you just need to know a good example to illustrate the problem.

But as we noted in §1, one can't motivate the radical sceptical paradox in such a

straightforward fashion, because the premises of this 'paradox' will strike the philosophically uninitiated as obviously false. Instead, it takes a skilled epistemologist to show folk that implicit within our everyday epistemic practices are commitments which can be employed to generate the sceptical problem. But this difference between these two 'paradoxes' raises a natural worry—*viz*., that while the problem of vagueness is a genuine paradox which involves only appeal to intuition, the problem of radical scepticism is not a genuine problem since it cannot be generated by intuition alone but requires in addition a substantial contribution from philosophical theory.

Although there is clearly a distinction to be drawn between the kind of philosophical problem posed by a problem like vagueness and that posed by radical scepticism, I think we should be wary about drawing the contrast in quite this way such that only the former is a genuine paradox. The first point to note is that it is somewhat tendentious to claim that philosophical theory is being employed in order to make a case for treating the radical sceptical problem as a paradox. This is certainly not how someone like Stroud would describe what he is doing, after all. In particular, he would claim that all that is happening here is that a philosopher is using her analytical skills in order to uncover the relevant epistemic commitments which are implicit in our everyday epistemic practices.

This leads us to a second, and more fundamental, point, one that is particularly salient for our purposes. Let us imagine someone who has been convinced by Stroud's arguments that the problem of radical scepticism really does arise out of our ordinary epistemic practices, and hence is a paradox. We can delineate two stages in this agent's response to the sceptical problem, so presented. In the first, she does not regard the premises of the argument as intuitive at all, but as rather claims which run counter to her instinctive judgements regarding the correct usage of the relevant epistemic concepts. In the second, she spontaneously judges the premises to be true and regards them as reflecting a correct usage of the relevant epistemic concepts.

The critical question for us is whether we should regard the agent's judgements in the second case as genuine intuitions, given what has taken place in the interim to convince her to form these judgements. If we are to hold that the problem of radical scepticism, even if Stroud's account of it as being implicit within our everyday epistemic practices is right, is not a paradox because it takes theoretical skill to get us to recognise the truth of the premises, then presumably this is because the relevant theoretical input entails that the judgments in

play are not genuine intuitions. Put another way, the claim is that the judgements made by the agent in the first case just described were genuine intuitions about the truth of the premises, but that the judgments made in the second case are in fact the product of philosophical theory and hence not intuitions.[13] But this is clearly problematic, since philosophers like Stroud (and many others for that matter) are obviously committed to thinking of the judgements made in the second case as the *real* intuitions.

It seems then that there is a tension here. On the one hand, there is a natural view about intuitions, such that they are uninformed by philosophical theory in any sense, and hence constitute a raw intellectual response to an intellectual stimulus. On the other hand, there is actual philosophical practice—at least as regards the fundamental philosophical debate regarding radical scepticism—which understands the target 'intuitions' in such a way that they can be the product of a significant degree of philosophical scene-setting.

4. INTUITIONS AND PHILOSOPHICAL METHODOLOGY

What I am here calling the 'natural view' about intuitions is effectively one on which intuitions are *mere* intellectual seemings, unguided by any sort of expertise or theoretical knowledge which would prompt us to 'see' things differently. This account of intuitions has no trouble explaining why the problem of vagueness is a paradox, since anyone who understands the propositions at issue will find themselves inclined to assent to their truth (even once they realise that all the claims that make up this paradox cannot be collectively true). But it struggles to account for what Stroud wants to take as being the reflectively-informed intuitions which drive the sceptical paradox. On this view, such judgements would presumably not count as intuitions at all. And yet, even though it takes some work to get people to 'see' things in the appropriate way, the judgements in question do seem to be naturally thought of as intuitive judgements. In particular, like intuitive judgements more generally, they are non-inferential and spontaneously formed.

I think that part of the obstacle to treating the reflection-informed judgements as intuitions is the analogy with perceptual seemings that tends to inform our conception of intuition. It is often noted, for example, that just as the lines in the Muller-Lyer illusion continue to seem of different length even once one becomes aware that they are in fact the

same length, so our judgement that a certain proposition is intuitive can remain even once theory has convinced us that this proposition must be false.[14] It is certainly true that our intuitive judgements often have this feature, and the problem of vagueness is a case in point. Even once one becomes convinced of a theoretical response to this particular problem, such that (say) one denies the premise that we saw generating this puzzle in the formulation offered above, one will still nonetheless tend to find this premise intuitive.

But if I am right that not all philosophical problems are like vagueness in this respect, in that they appeal to intuitions that require some setting-up on the part of the philosopher proposing the problem, then we need to complicate our picture of how intellectual seemings are analogous to perceptual seemings. For it seems that the problem of radical scepticism demonstrates the possibility that what once seemed intuitive can over time be overturned such that what was once intuitive is no longer intuitive; indeed, such that the *very opposite* of what was once intuitive is now intuitive. At the very least, if we want to understand the role that intuition is meant to play in philosophical methodology then we need to create the logical space for this possibility.

I suggest that it is not the perceptual analogy that is the problem, but rather a far too rigid application of that analogy. For clearly what we want to say is that when it comes to a debate like radical scepticism it is possible for someone who is first engaging with the debate to not see clearly what is at issue (even though they think that they do). The task of the philosopher, on any model of philosophy which can accommodate someone like Stroud anyway, is to help this person come to see the debate aright, and in doing so appreciate the intuitive force of the premises in play.

Indeed, I don't think the problem of radical scepticism is unique in this respect (if it were, then that would obviously be grounds to be suspicious about this debate). Consider, for instance, what happens when one introduces philosophy students to Robert Nozick's (1974) 'experience machine' for the first time. This is a machine that creates an artificial life for the subject which is experientially indistinguishable from 'real' life, in the sense that once one is in the machine one can't tell that one's experiences are in fact artificially generated. Let us stipulate that life inside the machine is significantly more pleasurable than normal life outside the machine. Here is the philosophical question: should one prefer an artificial life inside the machine, with all its additional attendant pleasure, to a real life outside the machine with all its attendant trials and tribulations?

My experience as someone who has often taught this example to students who are encountering philosophy for the first time is that insofar as the students have any initial opinions on this matter at all, then they tend to intuitively regard the life in the experience machine as at least no worse than the real life, and often preferable to the real life. Significantly, however, this judgement tends not to be stable. For example, if one asks the students whether they would be happy for their children to live their lives in the experience machine then most opt for the real life outside of the machine, even though they recognise that there is a tension between this judgement and their previous judgement about the desirability of the life in the machine. Relatedly, if one makes explicit that entering the machine is a one-way ticket—perhaps because one's body becomes unusable thereafter as part of the 're-orientation' process—then again students' intuitions tend to shift towards regarding the life outside the machine as being preferable to the life inside the machine. In fact, once one has explored the example in some detail then the groundswell of opinion tends to be in favour of treating the real life outside the machine as better than the artificial life inside the machine.

Here, then, we have a case in which people's initial verdicts about a scenario change over time in response to questioning and further reflection. Now we could describe this process as simply being one in which the philosopher impresses her intuitions on the audience, and indeed it may well be the case that this is what is happening (I will return to this issue). But what is meant to be taking place here is that the philosopher is getting the audience to see that their thinking about an issue is muddled, and to enable them to see this issue more clearly. Crucially, however, the judgements that the agent makes who does see the matter clearly are meant to be no less intuitive than were their initial, and conflicting, intuitive judgements in this regard. The analogy with the debate regarding radical scepticism as Stroud describes it should be clear.

If we take this way of thinking about philosophy seriously—and I am suggesting that we should—then will we need a conception of intuition which is consistent with it. Although this constraint on a theory of intuition might initially look to have substantive implications for our thinking about intuition, I think that on closer inspection this is not nearly as restrictive a constraint as it might first appear. First off, notice even the kind of deflationary accounts of intuition offered by such people as Timothy Williamson (e.g., 2004; 2007), such that intuitions are just inclinations to judge which have no distinctive epistemological role,

could be perfectly consistent with this constraint. All that matters for our purposes is that we are able to capture the sense in which these judgements can be epistemically improved via philosophical engagement while remaining intuitive judgements.[15]

Equally, this constraint is compatible with an account of intuition on which they have a distinctive aetiology, such as being triggered by understanding (see, e.g., Sosa 1998).[16] All that would be required is that we ensure that the aetiological story in play allows for the possibility of an improvement in one's intuitive judgement, as presumably it will be. To take the specific case of understanding, one would presumably just regard the revised intuitive judgment as being the product of a greater level of understanding.

Perhaps the only *prima facie* tension between this constraint on a theory of intuition and a particular type of theory of intuition arises when we consider views on which intuition is understood as a kind of intellectual seeming (e.g., Bealer 1987; 1996*a*; 1996*b*; 1998; Bonjour 1998). After all, one might regard such a view as treating only the initial judgement as a genuine intuition, since only this judgement qualifies as the 'pure' intellectual seeming. But even proponents of this kind of view do not appear to be inclined towards this kind of restrictive line, and there seems nothing inherent within the intellectual seeming view that would necessitate that it should be so restrictive.[17]

So I don't think that this conception of the role of intuition in philosophical methodology need create any particular problems for the theory of intuition, at least on closer inspection. Where it does have a bearing is on how we should respond to a certain style of attack on philosophical methodology that can be found in the recent literature.

5. THE NEGATIVE PROGRAMME IN EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

One of the most significant movements in contemporary philosophy has been experimental philosophy, where experimental work has been done surveying the intuitive judgements made by non-philosophers to examples that are relevant to philosophy. So, for example, where philosophers have argued that it is intuitive to respond to a certain described scenario in a certain way, experimental philosophers have done a systematic survey of non-philosopher's immediate responses to this scenario to see how this corresponds to the intuitional 'data' offered by the philosopher.

Following Jonathan Weinberg (2010), we can draw a distinction between a 'positive' and a 'negative' programme in experimental philosophy.[18] Whereas the former is meant to merely offer supplementary data for philosophers to appeal to, the latter is meant to undermine philosophers' attempts to appeal to intuitions. It is the latter programme that I want to focus on here.

One way in which the negative programme has been motivated has been by appeal to a significant mismatch between the experimental data that has been uncovered and the corresponding intuitional data offered by philosophers. In particular, where it can be shown that the mismatch is systematic—in that people from, say, different cultures to those from which the intuitional data is usually drawn offer different responses to cases—then the case for the negative programme can seem very strong.[19] Of course, there have been disputes about the nature of the experimental data in question—e.g., how the questions were posed, and so on—and a lot of the focus with regard to the negative programme in experimental philosophy has been on this issue.[20] This is not my concern here, however.

Rather, my concern is whether there is something wrong-headed about equating the intuitional data appealed to by philosophers to the immediate responses to cases offered by the philosophically uninformed. The case of the sceptical paradox (or, for that matter, Nozick's experience machine) seems to indicate otherwise. But if that's right then nothing need follow from the fact that the experimental data radically conflicts with the intuitional data offered by philosophers. What would be key would be the type of philosophical intuition that is being appealed to. If it is an intuition of the sort that is present in the paradox of vagueness then this mismatch might well be significant, since here the intuitions do indeed reflect an immediate philosophically uninformed response to (in this case) a proposition. If in this case the 'folk' turned out not to have the same intuitions as the philosophers then this would surely be cause for concern. But when it comes to debates like radical scepticism where the relevant philosophical intuition is putatively informed by philosophical expertise, then the mere existence of this mismatch between 'folk' and 'philosophical' intuitive judgements is far from being philosophically problematic. Indeed, it is entirely to be expected.

Does this mean that the negative programme in experimental philosophy is potentially in jeopardy? I don't think so.

First, notice that at most all that follows from the conception of intuition offered

above is that we shouldn't expect the experimental data *in certain cases* to correspond to the intuitional data offered by philosophers. If the range of those 'certain cases' is relatively slim, then the negative programme can still inflict a great deal of damage on the philosophical appeal to intuition. In particular, notice that while flagging the particular way in which intuition is appealed to with regard to the problem of radical scepticism we also made a point of demonstrating how the philosophical use of intuition can often involve an appeal to a subject's immediate response to a case (as in the case of the paradox of vagueness). The idea that the philosopher's use of intuition can sometimes involve expertise is thus not a panacea which can offer a blanket cure to the very specific sceptical challenge posed by the negative programme.

Second, even if it is true that the philosophical use of intuition is such that in certain cases a great deal of skill is required in order to elicit the relevant intuition, it still doesn't follow that philosophers should be unconcerned about the challenge posed by the proponent of the negative programme. The point would instead be that the point of attack for the proponent of this programme shouldn't come from a mere consideration of the immediate responses of subjects to certain cases, but should rather confront head-on the philosopher's appeal to expertise. For if it can be shown that this appeal to expertise is illusory, then that could cause a serious headache for philosophers.

There are at least two ways in which proponents of the negative programme might go about doing this. One way would be to make use of recent work in experimental psychology on this very issue, since there is a growing literature regarding studies which show, for example, that subjects can often overestimate their level of expertise, particularly when it comes to failing to realise just how narrow their specialised field of competence is.[21] A second possibility, which could dovetail with the first, is to show that there is something inherently dubious about the process by which subjects are 'trained' to acquire philosophical 'intuitions'. This second issue is particularly pressing given that the philosophical use of intuition appears to face the so-called 'calibration problem'. For whereas other epistemic sources, such as perceptual observation, can be calibrated for their reliability by comparing their results against results gained from other sources, this doesn't seem to be available in the case of philosophical intuition, since this seems only to be testable by appeal to other philosophical intuitions.[22]

Furthermore, notice that the particular way in which philosophical intuitions are

appealed to in a debate like radical scepticism can itself be a source of scepticism in this regard. For insofar as philosophical expertise is required in order to set-up a philosophical problem, then that surely provides an impetus towards a quietistic response to the problem which maintains that the 'paradox' in play is in fact just the product of faulty—and dispensable—philosophical theory. Indeed, this was just how the issue of radical scepticism played out above if one opted for the Wittgensteinian response to the problem. It should be clear that any philosophical problem which requires philosophical expertise to set-up would be *prima facie* amenable to a corresponding quietistic response. Empirical and theoretical concerns about the philosopher's appeal to expertise would thus find common cause with the quietist's concerns about how philosophy can be the source, rather than the resolution, of philosophical problems.

So while I hold that a philosophical problem like radical scepticism demonstrates that we need to re-think the role that intuitions play in philosophical methodology, and that this creates problems for a crude rendering of the negative programme in experimental philosophy, I certainly don't think that moving to this reoriented conception of the role of intuitions in philosophical methodology completely undermines the challenge posed by this branch of experimental philosophy. The reason for this is that such a reoriented conception exposes a key source of vulnerability in the philosophical project, and thus highlights just where the proponent of the negative programme needs to re-target their attack.[23]

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

My concern in this paper has been to show what the debate regarding radical scepticism reveals about the nature of the philosopher's appeal to intuition. I have argued that we need to make room for the possibility that the intuitional judgements relevant to philosophy can sometimes be quite significantly informed by expertise. I have noted that this poses a *prima facie* problem for the negative programme in experimental philosophy, in that it means that one cannot conclude from the fact that there is a significant mismatch between the intuitional data appealed to by philosophers and the experimental data that there is thereby a problem posed for the philosophical use of intuition. But I have also argued that at best this only provides philosophy with a provisional, and possibly quite narrow, defence of its use of

intuition. On the one hand, it is potentially a narrow defence because it is still the case that quite a lot of the philosophical use of intuition might well be susceptible to the critique offered by the negative programme. On the other hand, it is a provisional defence in that it in effect highlights what the proper target of the critique offered by the negative programme in experimental philosophy should be, which is on the appeal to philosophical expertise, something which can itself be called into question on experimental grounds. On this score, as we have seen, there is further support to be found from philosophers themselves, particularly from those approaching philosophical problems from quietistic quarters. In particular, the very debates that motivate the idea that we need to understand the philosophical use of intuition as requiring philosophical expertise are also the ones most susceptible to a quietistic critique.[24]

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NOTES

[1] See Pritchard (2002) for a survey of recent work on the radical sceptical problem, with particular focus on this specific formulation of that problem.

[2] Cf. Putnam (1981, ch. 1). For an overview of some of the philosophical issues with regard to this sceptical scenario, see Brueckner (2004).

[3] Such as Pyrrhonian scepticism, which among other things differs from the sceptical argument just given in that it is not even expressed in the form of an argument. I discuss Pyrrhonian scepticism, and its relationship to the broadly 'Cartesian' scepticism that is our focus, elsewhere. See especially Pritchard (2000; 2005, ch. 8; 2011*b*). See also endnote 6, where I briefly remark on the very different sceptical problem of the criterion.

[4] It is important to distinguish this key element in Stroud's writings on radical scepticism from a second strand in his thinking on this topic which is superficially similar and in some respects closely related. This second strand is Stroud's *meta*epistemological scepticism about the viability of adequately conducting the epistemological project. Although there are some important points of contact between Stroud's motivation for offering this metaepistemological scepticism and his motivation for defending the thesis that scepticism is a genuine paradox, since they are distinct problems they require distinct treatments, and I will not be discussing this second strand in Stroud's work on radical scepticism here. For two key exchanges regarding Stroud's metaepistemological scepticism, see Sosa (1994) and Stroud (1994) and Cassam (2009) and Stroud (2009). See also Stroud (1989).

[5] Note that Stroud in effect appeals to a different second premise in setting up his version of the sceptical argument, one that is logically stronger and which Stroud argues is endorsed by Descartes in his *Meditations*. See Stroud (1984, ch. 1). Nothing hangs on this difference, so for our purposes we can focus on the weaker, and more widely endorsed, formulation of the second premise.

[6] I am here bracketing Chisholm's important work on the problem of the criterion (e.g., Chisholm 1973). While this problem is undoubtedly a sceptical paradox in the relevant sense—and was regarded as such, by Chisholm and some of his contemporaries—it is very different from the kind of sceptical paradox currently under consideration, which essentially turns on radical sceptical hypotheses. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for Oxford University Press for pressing me on this issue.

[7] See especially Stroud (1984, ch. 2).

[8] There may be other ways to motivate the sceptical paradox while granting that the premises that make up that paradox do not reflect our ordinary epistemic practices. Craig (1991), for example, offers an influential account of the concept of knowledge—what we might broadly class as a 'genealogical' account—which elucidates the basic human need that this concept serves. One consequence of the specific genealogical proposal that Craig offers is that the extension that we would expect our concept of knowledge to have given the basic human need that it answers to will not be the extension that it in fact has. Although the account which Craig offers does not have any obvious sceptical implications, one could imagine a version of this sort of proposal which exploited the gap between the actual extension of the concept of knowledge and the expected extension given the purpose that it is meant to serve to explain why radical scepticism is rooted in our everyday epistemic practices even if not fully displayed within them. For some key discussions of Craig's proposal, see Lane (1999), Williams (2002), Neta (2006), Fricker (2007; 2010), Kusch (2009; 2011), Kappel (2010), and Kornblith (2011). See also Pritchard (2011*a*; 2012*a*).

[9] For further discussion of this aspect of Wittgenstein's anti-scepticism, see Pritchard (2011*c*; 2012*c*; *forthcoming*). For a seminal discussion of the general idea in play here—*viz*., that Wittgenstein is trying to show that radical scepticism is the product of theory rather than commonsense—see Williams (1995).

[10] Another way of expressing this point—due to Schiffer (1996)—is that if radical scepticism poses a paradox then there is no 'happy face' solution to this problem, only a 'sad face' solution, because it would mean that there is a "deep-seated incoherence" within our concept of knowledge (Schiffer 1996, 330).

[11] Note as well that there is an important dialectical shift when we are dealing with a philosophical problem *qua* paradox. This is because paradoxes expose fundamental tensions within our own concepts, and hence constitute problems for everyone. In contrast, if one can show that a putative paradox is merely the product of a theoretical commitment, then it is easier to disengage oneself from the problem by treating it as a difficulty for a particular philosophical stance. For an excellent discussion of this point, and its implications for the radical sceptical problem, see Wright (1991).

[12] Interestingly, while many commentators have noted quietistic themes in Wittgenstein's earlier work, particularly the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953), there hasn't been much discussion of the quietism

that seems to be clearly on display in *On Certainty* (which consists of his final notebooks). For an excellent recent discussion of Wittgenstein's quietism, see McDowell (2009).

[13] Note that the contrast here is not between pre-theoretical intuitive judgement and intuitive judgement that is informed by theory, but rather between pre-theoretical intuitive judgement and intuitive judgement that is informed by *philosophical* theory. After all, one might view our folk epistemology as being itself a kind of theory, and hence even our 'pre-theoretical' intuitive judgements with regard to the sceptical problem could be to this extent the products of theory. That wouldn't make them the products of philosophical theory though. I am grateful to Darrell Rowbottom for pressing me on this issue.

[14] See, for example, Sosa (2007*a*, ch. 3).

[15] Indeed, see Williamson (2007, 191) for a clear defence of the idea that the philosophical use of intuitions requires a significant level of expertise. (Note, however, that Williamson is motivating this as a general claim about philosophical methodology, while I am here only arguing that this applies within certain philosophical debates, like that concerning radical scepticism).

[16] Indeed, a recurrent motif of Sosa's work on intuition is that skill can be required to elicit certain intuitions. See Sosa (1998; 2007*a*, ch. 3; 2007*b*; 2007*c*; 2009).

[17] Indeed, the most prominent advocate of this account of intuition seems inclined to treat the initial judgements as *not* being, strictly speaking, intuitive judgements at all. See, for example, Bealer (1998).

[18] Weinberg (2010, 823) in turn credits this distinction to Farid Masrour.

[19] See, for example, Stich, Nichols & Weinberg (2003) and Swain & Weinberg (2008).

[20] See, for example, Kauppinen (2007), Sosa (2007*b*), Levin (2009), Cullen (2010) and Deutsch (2010).

[21] Weinberg (2010, §III) offers an interesting discussion of the relevant empirical literature, and how it might be brought to bear in support of the negative programme in experimental philosophy. See also Weinberg *et al* (2010).

[22] This problem is usually credited to Cummins (1998). For some key discussions of this problem, see Weatherson (2003), Nagel (2007) and Weinberg *et al* (2012).

[23] For further discussion of the implications of the negative programme in experimental philosophy for contemporary epistemology, see Pritchard (2012*b*).

[24] Thanks to David Bloor, Cameron Boult, Adam Carter, Stew Cohen, Axel Gelfert, Georgi Gardiner, Mikkel Gerken, Sandy Goldberg, Alvin Goldman, Peter Graham, John Greco, Allan Hazlett, David Henderson, Jesper Kallestrup, Chris Kelp, Klemens Kappel, Hilary Kornblith, Joseph Kuntz, Martin Kusch, Mike Lynch, Ram Neta, Chris Ranalli, Shane Ryan, Ernie Sosa, and Stefan Tolksdorf for helpful discussion of the topics covered in this paper. Special thanks to Darrell Rowbottom, and to two anonymous referees for Oxford University Press, who provided detailed comments on an earlier incarnation. This paper was for the most part written while I was in receipt of a Philip Leverhulme Prize.